LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

Bissell Street District

2100-Block of Bissell Street between Webster and Dickens Avenues

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Preliminary Landmark recommendation approved by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, February 2, 2006

CITY OF CHICAGO
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development
Lori T. Healey, Commissioner

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. The Commission is responsible for recommending to the City Council which individual buildings, sites, objects, or districts should be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law.

The landmark designation process begins with a staff study and a preliminary summary of information related to the potential designation criteria. The next step is a preliminary vote by the landmarks commission as to whether the proposed landmark is worthy of consideration. This vote not only initiates the formal designation process, but it places the review of city permits for the property under the jurisdiction of the Commission until a final landmark recommendation is acted on by the City Council.

This Landmark Designation Report is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation process. Only language contained within the designation ordinance adopted by the City Council should be regarded as final.

BISSELL STREET DISTRICT

2100-Block of Bissell Street

Date: 1883
Architect: Iver C. Zarbell

As Chicago developed during the late-19th and early 20th centuries, its residential neighborhoods were largely developed with speculative housing built by developers. The Bissell Street District is an outstanding early example of this important aspect of the City's history, containing a visually unusual collection of early Chicago "flat" apartment buildings built during a period of intense residential development in Chicago, and the Lincoln Park neighborhood in particular.

The twenty buildings that make up the District were designed by architect Iver C. Zarbell for developer John T. Davis, a wealthy St. Louis resident who invested in real estate in several cities besides Chicago. The ensemble of three-, six-, and nine-flat buildings that line both sides of the 2100 block of North Bissell Street form an especially cohesive residential streetscape that conveys the scale, aesthetic values, and craftsmanship that defined the middle-class housing of late nineteenth-century Chicago. These early flat buildings represent a transition between the long rows of joined townhomes which preceded it, and the two- and three-flat apartment buildings that were soon to become a staple of Chicago residential architecture up through the twentieth century. The early flat buildings in the Bissell Street District, with their high degree of physical integrity and handsome architectural character, are unusual survivors given the degree of redevelopment that has reshaped the City's residential neighborhoods during the 20th century.

District History and Description

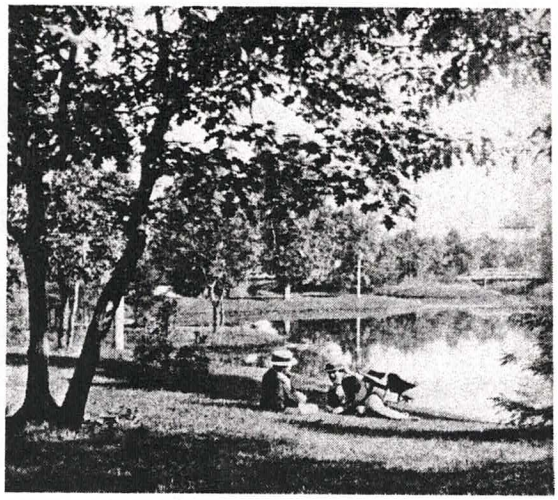
The Bissell Street District is situated in the Lincoln Park neighborhood, which is bounded by North Avenue on the south, Diversey Parkway on the north, Lake Michigan on the east, and the North Branch of the Chicago River to the west. The eastern portion of the neighborhood adjacent to Lincoln Park—the community's namesake park situated along the shores of Lake Michigan—historically has been dominated by upper-income housing, while further west the neighborhood developed as a place for middle- and working-class Chicagoans. A swath of factories, an important source of jobs for neighborhood residents, was built up between Clybourn Avenue and the river during the late 19th century. Situated between the upper-class eastern edge of the community and the industrial western border, the Bissell Street District was designed for an emerging middle class.

Much of the Lincoln Park neighborhood, north to Fullerton, was part of the City of Chicago by 1853. Prior to that time, the area was dominated by small farms and nurseries. The portion of the neighborhood which included the Bissell Street District was first platted at the time of annexation as Sheffield's Addition to Chicago, named for a leading property owner, Joseph Sheffield, who ran a local plant nursery. Once joined to the City of Chicago, the transformation of the area from a farming community began by subdivision of the large properties into residential lots and the introduction of the urban street grid.

The Fire of 1871 destroyed many of the buildings in the eastern portion of Lincoln Park, however much of the western part of the neighborhood had not yet been developed. Very rapid growth occurred in this undeveloped part of the neighborhood during the post-Fire reconstruction of the City. Cottages, row houses, and flats were built along residential streets such as Bissell, while commercial buildings sprung up on arterial streets such as Armitage and Halsted. In 1874, city ordinances requiring more expensive masonry construction contributed to the resulting architectural character of the area, as is evidenced by the brick and stone used in the buildings found in the Bissell Street District. As with most of Lincoln Park, the western portion of the community developed as a predominantly German area, although a small Irish enclave existed near the parish of St. Vincent de Paul, established at Sheffield and Webster Avenues in 1875 just west of the Bissell Street District.

Improvements in public transportation stimulated residential and commercial development in Lincoln Park during the last quarter of the 19th century. The Bissell Street District was located directly between two horse-drawn streetcar lines running along both Webster Avenue and Dickens Street, which were established a year before construction of the District's flats in 1883. These lines provided connections with routes downtown as well as the nearby commercial areas along Armitage and Halsted. The horse car routes were expanded during the later 1880s, and faster cable-drawn cars were introduced in 1888. Evolution of public transportation in the area culminated in the elevated train (now operated as the Chicago Transit Authority's Red Line) which was constructed from 1894 to 1900. Bissell Street itself was paved with vitrified brick and cedar blocks by 1898.

Left: The Bissell Street District is located in the western part of the Lincoln Park community area commonly known as the Sheffield neighborhood. Top and middle: The district consists of 20 buildings lining both sides of the 2100-block of N. Bissell St., between Dickens and Webster Avenues.



The Lincoln Park neighborhood, within which the Bissell Street District is located, developed during the late 19th century due to its location between (top left) the growing industrial corridor centered on the North Branch of the Chicago River and (top right) the lakefront Lincoln Park. Right: The Fremont Row House District, located just to the east of Bissell, exemplifies the early rowhouse development in the neighborhood as it developed after the Chicago Fire of 1871. Bottom: Armitage Avenue, seen here in a turn-of-the-last century photograph, developed, along with Halsted Street, as the primary commercial street serving the surrounding neighborhood.

The earliest documentation of the District appears in the August 1883 issue of the *Inland Architect and Builder*. A brief notice stated that architect I. C. Zarbell had been commissioned by developer John T. Davis to build homes on Bissell Street between Webster and Garfield (now Dickens), describing each as "two stories and basement in pressed brick. The basements and first floors rent together or separately." The budget for the project was $125,000, and today the buildings reflect the architectural quality that was once lavished upon even modest apartment buildings. Built in architectural styles that were important in the development of Chicago residential architecture during the period of the District's development, these buildings display fine craftsmanship in brick, stone, and metal. Because the District was financed, designed, and built as a complete development at one time, it possesses a unified design and organized layout that is unusual among Chicago residential blocks.

The developer of the Bissell Street District, **John T. Davis (1844-1894)**, was a wealthy merchant from St. Louis. He inherited his father Samuel's very prosperous wholesale dry goods business, and expanded his fortunes through large real estate holdings in St. Louis, New York, Boston, and Chicago. Davis was 39 when he added the Bissell development to this portfolio.

Davis was influential in business and social circles of St. Louis, and he appears in numerous contemporary biographical dictionaries published in that city in the late 19th century. At the time of his death at the age of 50 in 1894, John T. Davis was regarded as Missouri's wealthiest man, and his estate was valued at fifteen to twenty-five million dollars. Nevertheless, there is little record of him in Chicago outside of his real estate transactions, and available local building records of the period do not indicate that Davis was a prolific builder in Chicago. The Bissell flats appear to be his most prominent real estate investment. The Bissell Street District continued to be owned and managed by the Davis estate until at least 1898.

The district's architect, **Iver C. Zarbell,** was a Chicago architect who designed single-family residences, flats, and industrial buildings throughout the City. He is a relatively obscure figure in the Chicago architectural community of the period, but it is known that he resided in Chicago as early as 1869 and that he maintained a downtown business address in the Reaper Block after the Fire. Building notices from the period indicate that he had a prolific and steady architectural career spanning from 1883 to 1911. His clients included Arnold, Schwinn & Co., the prominent bicycle manufacturing company. The Bissell Street District's buildings were one of his earliest commissions. He died in 1925.

District Description

There are twenty buildings in the District, taking up most of the 2100-block of Bissell Street, and the composition and distribution of buildings within the District consists of a visually distinctive pattern of visually unusual three-flats, six-flats and nine-flats that lends a formal, planned quality to what was a speculative housing project. Although generally two floors in height, the District's buildings were built with raised first floors and basement apartments. Two large nine-flats serve as visual centerpieces in the middle of the block, and are flanked by 16 smaller six-flats. Like bookends, narrow three-flats are placed at the north and south ends of the District at the intersection with Dickens to the south and with Webster to the north. Using these three types of flat buildings, and creating variations of the basic six-flat design, Zarbell

Top: The Bissell Street District is an unusual architectural "setpiece," consisting of two nine-flat buildings, centrally located on both sides of the block, which are flanked by a variety of smaller six- and three-flat buildings. Bottom: One of the District's nine-flat buildings, with its striking, Second Empire-style mansard roof.

Six-flats make up the majority of the buildings in the District and are varied in their details. Top, middle left and middle right: Three representative six-flat buildings. Bottom left and right: Three-flats are located at the ends of the block like bookends.

gave the block a touch of visual grandeur, Zarbell avoided the homogenous appearance of typical row houses of the period, while at the same time standardizing the construction of the District to some degree, an economizing measure which may have appealed to Davis.

On each side of the street, the various types of flat buildings are arranged symmetrically, creating an unusual visual rhythm on each side of the street. The largest and most visually prominent buildings are a pair of large nine-flat buildings facing the center of the block. These anchors are flanked on either side by six-flats, with the varying designs arranged symmetrically on either side of it. Identical in design, these anchor buildings are the largest and most architecturally distinguished of the buildings represented in the district. Each has a central projecting pavilion topped with a mansard roof containing a partial third story. A hallmark of the Second Empire style, each mansard roof is pierced by a dormer ornamented with Classical-style pediments, covered with slate shingles, and trimmed with pressed-metal molding. Each central pavilion is flanked by segmented bays running the full height of the facade, and topped by a pair of segmented domes at the roofline. This ornamental roofline is carried atop a pressed-metal cornice which is highly detailed with brackets, a dentil band, and geometric shapes.

Flanking each central nine-flats are groupings of 3 six-flats, which make up the majority of buildings (16) in the District. These flat buildings can be further categorized in three variations, which are arranged differently on each side of Bissell. On the west side of the block, the three types are organized so that the more architecturally distinguished and larger of these types are placed closer to the center, with the simpler designs occurring towards the end of the block. On the east side of the block, the most prominent of the six-flats are sited closer to the ends of the block.

The most prominent of the six-flat designs features a recess in the center of the building's facade, topped with a false-front mansard roof. A pair of polygonal bays run the full height of the building, pierced with lancet windows and tied together by a soffit at the first story. A second set of six-flats is distinguished by a low mansard which interrupts the cornice line, with a band of corbeled brick at the base of this mansard. The third of the six-flat designs is distinctive in the District for its extensive limestone ornament. The recessed bays at either side of the facade are framed by vertical and horizontal limestone banding, and the projecting entrance bay features a limestone surround.

At the ends of the block are three-flats, with two design variations which closely follow the design motifs of the six-flats while occupying a narrower footprint. One set features a prominent pedimented cornice and a flat facade with limestone belt courses. The second type are closely-spaced three-flats with mirror-image facades, almost resembling a six-flat.

The buildings in the Bissell Street District possess common features that contribute to the unusual visual cohesiveness of the District Each building is separated from the sidewalk by a narrow front yard and a common setback. Building footprints occupy most of the lot, so side and rear yards are minimal. All are two stories with a raised basement, with the exception of the partial third story in the two central buildings. Elaborately ornamented cornices and mansard roofs hide the utilitarian flat roofs which top each building.

All of the main facades are constructed of deep red hydraulic-pressed brick. Ornamental brick work is limited to corbeling around some of the projecting bays, and a dentil band expressed in the brick bond pattern in one of the six-flat designs. Horizontal courses of black tinted brick were incorporated in some of the facades, yet only a few traces of this color detail have survived. Another polychrome detail found in the District are glazed tiles set in the facades of the pair of central nine-flat buildings, a common feature of Queen Anne-style buildings. Chicago common brick was used for less visible rear and side elevations.

Architectural decoration in the district is limited to the front facades and expressed primarily in limestone trim, pressed-metal cornices, and mansard roofs. Weathered Joliet limestone, with its characteristic buttery-yellow, color provides variation in color and line in each of the design sub-types. Limestone band courses, lintels, sills, and entrance surrounds are carved with dentils, rosettes, acanthus motifs, and conventionalized foliate line decoration that reflect the common architectural styles of the early 1880s. Stone hood lintels, for example, on some buildings are incised with botanical patterns, a typical feature of the Italianate style, while lintels on other buildings are craved with a Classical-style egg-and-dart profile. The carved limestone details in the District identify the buildings with popular architecture styles of the period and exemplify a high degree of craftsmanship. The distinct color and texture of the Joliet limestone found in the District also identifies the buildings with the earliest stone masonry in Chicago, as the use of the Joliet stone began to give way to gray Bedford limestone from Indiana by the turn of the twentieth century.

Window openings are symmetrically arranged on the facade, with fairly uniform spacing and sizing. Primary entrances are raised and generally located at the center of the front facades, marked by a recess or projection in the exterior wall, or by a carved stone surround and hood. Depending on the number of apartments in a building, some of the entrances are grouped in pairs.

Porches are uncovered except for a narrow soffit at the entrance of several buildings. Stoops with exterior stairs and a small landing at the door level was the historic norm for each building, with entrances to the basement level flats located beneath the stoops. None of the original exterior stairs or landings survive in the District, though some original cast-iron railings and newel posts remain.

Taken together, the pressed-metal cornices atop each building form a nearly continuous horizontal line, visually binding the District's buildings together, although each design type features variations in cornice design. Detailed with pressed-metal paneling, ornamentation based on plant motifs, Classical-style pediments, and other geometric decoration, the cornices on Bissell Street create a vivid sense of place.

Pressed-metal decoration of this type was a typical building motif for Chicago neighborhoods built during the late 19th century. Victorian-era Chicagoans favored architecture made elaborate with applied ornament, and pressed metalwork could be bought ready-made from trade catalogs or local companies. Even simple flat buildings, like those on Bissell, could be

embellished with popular motifs. The construction of the Bissell Street District coincided with the heyday for pressed-metal ornament of the1880s, and the cornices in the District exhibit the high degree of craftsmanship and detail that was achieved with the material at this time.

Most Chicago buildings from this period were built with some degree of pressed-metal ornament, however much has been lost through corrosion, demolition, and alteration. Few existing streetscapes in the city retain both the concentration and exceptional and distinctive architectural quality of elaborate metal-ornamented buildings as does the Bissell Street District.

The District's use of mansard roofs remains an unusual decorative touch in the context of Chicago architecture. Very popular throughout the United States during the 1870s and early 1880s, and seen as a sign of high-quality design due to its origins in French architecture, relatively few mansard-roofed buildings survive in Chicago. The Bissell Street District is therefore an unusual and significant Chicago group of such buildings, and unique in Chicago in this respect. Such mansard-roofed buildings were commonly built in St. Louis during the 1870s and early 1880s, and perhaps reflect the architectural taste of developer Davis.

Architectural Styles

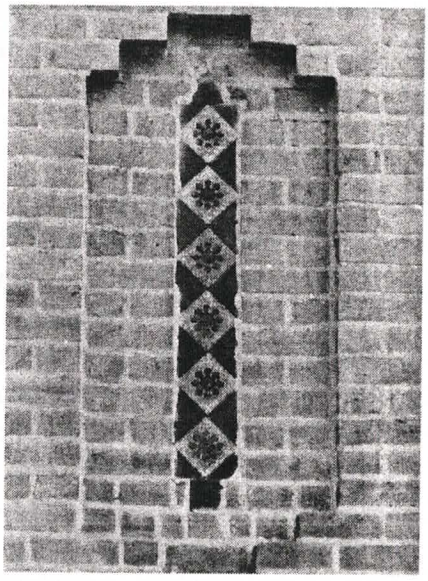
The District exhibits a mix of Italianate, Second Empire, and Queen Anne stylistic influences. Such visual eclecticism is a characteristic of much late 19th- and early 20th-century architecture, especially those buildings found in Chicago's residential architecture. These architectural styles give the buildings in the Bissell Street District their visual richness and character.

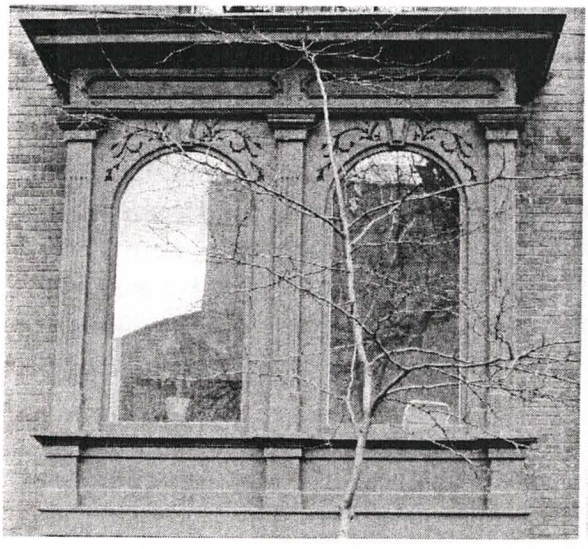
The **Italianate** style was originally inspired by the villas of northern Italy. The early 19th-century architect Andrew Jackson Downing helped popularize the style during the 1840s and 1850s with the publication of influential pattern books—publications illustrated with buildings designs, plans and details that could be built by carpenters and builders using the book as a construction guide—that included Italianate-style country and suburban houses. The Italianate style's easy adaptability in terms of materials and detailing made it a nearly national style by the Civil War era, and it remained popular into the 1880s for many types of buildings, including both residential and commercial.

The Italianate was Chicago's predominant architectural style during the 1870s and 80s, and coincided with the development of the Bissell Street District. Examples of Italianate details in the District include lintels with incised or carved foliate ornament, limestone door surrounds, elaborate cornices with bracketed details, and vertically proportioned window openings.

The **Second Empire** style uses many of the design elements of the Italianate style, including elaborate window moldings and bracketed cornices. The feature that uniquely marks the style as unique is its use of the "mansard" roof—a double-pitched roof with a steep lower slope. This distinctive roof profile was named for the 17th-century French architect Francois Mansart. It was extensively used for fashionable Parisian buildings during the reign of Napoleon III, a period from 1852 to 1870 popularly known as France's "Second Empire." The mansard is used for the most prominent "anchor" nine-flat buildings and several other buildings in the District.

Architectural details in the District are drawn from an eclectic mix of styles that were popular in the period. The mansard roof is a motif of the French Second Empire style. The leaf-like incised carving in the stone window hoods and projecting bay are derived from the Italianate. The pressed-metal cornice provided an affordable but elaborate roofline with Classical detail. The use of multiple materials, typical of the Queen Anne style, is reflected in the glazed tile medallions set in to the front facade.





The **Queen Anne** style was popular in Chicago during the 1880s and 1890s. The name was coined in England to describe asymmetrical buildings that combined medieval and classical forms and ornament. In America, the Queen Anne was originally used for suburban houses and seaside resort cottages, but it quickly became a popular style for both urban residences and commercial buildings that incorporate a variety of details, materials, and shapes to create a picturesque design. A characteristic of the Queen Anne style in the District is the treatment of the facade as a series of recessed and projecting wall planes and the inclusion of polygonal bays. Other representative features of the Queen Anne style include the patterned slate shingles at the mansards and the combination of stone, tile, and brick materials at the front facade.

The streetscape of the District exemplifies the ability of late 19th-century developers, architects, and builders to create rental flat buildings that were carefully laid out as a whole, architecturally satisfying in their detail, and marked by high craftsmanship and materials. The District has survived largely unaltered, without loss of individual structures that would result in a "gap-toothed" streetscape and buildings from later periods. This well-designed residential district retains its original scale, materials, and architectural ornament, and conveys the aesthetic and urban values of the period of its construction.

Later History

The construction of the Northwestern Elevated Railroad Co. rapid transit elevated rail line between the North Side and Chicago's Loop resulted in the last major burst of development in Lincoln Park. The line (now operated as the Chicago Transit Authority's Red and Brown Lines) was constructed between 1894 and 1900. The elevated railroad's right-of-way was located in the north-south alley between Bissell Street and Sheffield Avenue, directly behind the rear elevations of the buildings on the west side of Bissell. Construction of the elevated structure required that the rear of these buildings be altered to allow space for the new elevated right-of-way. In 1896 a building permit was issued to John T. Davis's estate for the "rebuilding of brick walls" for these buildings. The alteration is also confirmed by fire-insurance atlases of the period. As a result, the flats on the west side of Bissell now have less depth than those on the east side of the street. Fortunately, this early alteration did not result in any change to the features of the front facades of buildings.

The 1900 Federal Census reveals that the early residents of the flats were largely middle- and working class families. A sampling of the occupations listed for the residents includes: clerk at the Board of Trade, traveling salesman, printer, lithographer, milliner, florist, machinist, police officer, saloon keeper, retail clerk, music teacher, railroad brakeman, and streetcar conductor. The majority of the adult residents were first-generation Americans, though a few were immigrants from Germany, Austria, Ireland, and England. The majority of the flats were occupied by families with school-age children, and in several cases it appears that families would occupy multiple flats in the buildings. The family groups often included grandparents, boarders, and in one case a domestic servant.

In 1896, properties in the Bissell Street District appeared in the rental listings of the *Chicago Tribune,* E. W. Zander & Co. offered "10 room houses, all modern" on Bissell Street between

Dickens and Webster for $30. Two years later in 1898, a petition to rename Bissell Street to Dewey Avenue (after Commodore George Dewey, the naval hero of the Spanish-American War) raised some controversy, and registered a short notice in the June 29th *Chicago Tribune*. The article revealed apparent class divisions between home-owners and renters residing on the street. The article reported that property owners opposed the proposed name change and described "the residents of the flats" as "most anxious for the change." The block between Webster and Garfield (now Dickens) was identified as a rental district owned by the Davis estate, perhaps implicating this block to be largely supportive of the Dewey petition. The article went on that "these persons are a changing population, [and] the permanent residents do not think they ought to interfere." Bissell Street was seven blocks long at the time, and other residents of the street who signed the unpopular petition included, according to the newspaper article "people who have been connected with city politics at one time and another" and members of the Garden City Cycling Club, some of whom were indicted for organizing wagered bicycle races on Sundays.

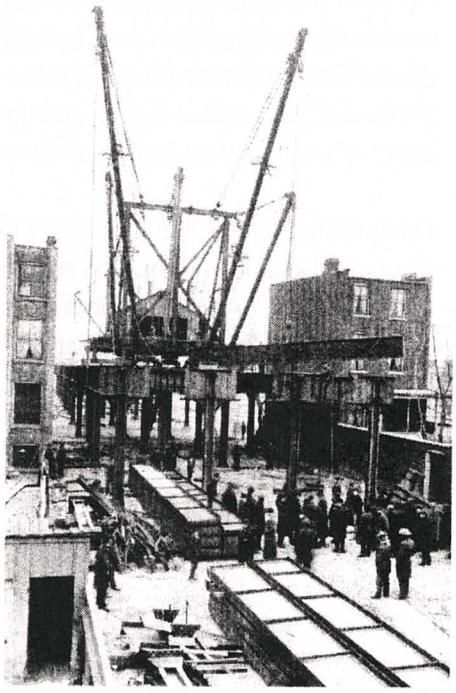
The western part of Lincoln Park, including the Bissell Street District, was fully developed by the 1920s and remained a stable, residential district through World War II. The growth of Chicago suburbs and population shifts following the war, however, resulted in a period of decline for much of the Lincoln Park community area. Nevertheless, the architecture of the Bissell Street District survived the decline and the subsequent urban renewal programs of the 1960s and 70s. In its original configuration the district contained 120 apartments, yet over time many of the flats have been combined into larger owner-occupied residences.

The buildings of the Bissell Street District have been recognized for their architectural quality in several publications. The Chicago Historic Resources Survey rated almost all of the buildings in the District as "orange," or significant to the neighborhood. The block has also been cited in the *AIA Guide to Chicago*. In addition, they were noted as "structures of special distinction" in the nomination form for the Sheffield Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976.

Early Apartment Design and Construction in Chicago

The Bissell Street District, with its rows of tightly-spaced apartment buildings, reflects the increasing density and building scale that became characteristic of Chicago's urban residential districts. These neighborhoods, especially those with ready access to downtown through newly established streetcar and elevated lines, developed with buildings that reflected both the increasing land values of these areas and the middle- and working-class Chicagoans, many of them immigrants, that wanted attractive yet affordable housing.

Early in Chicago's history, most Chicagoans lived in free-standing single family homes. Indeed Chicago's motto, *Urbs in Horto* or "City of a Garden" refers to the early ideal of the single family home set amid ample garden space. In Chicago, as in many growing American cities, apartment buildings did not begin to be built until the 19th century, when both population growth



During the 1890s, the Northwestern Elevated Railroad Company built the North Side elevated railroad immediately to the west of Bissell. Top: Historic photo of the elevated tracks looking north from Armitage. Bottom left and right: Construction photographs of the elevated railroad (now the Chicago Transit Authority Red and Brown Lines).

and land and building costs worked together to create a need for multi-family residential buildings.

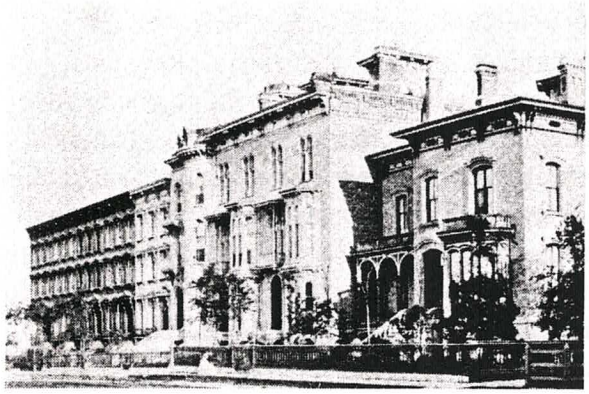
In the country's early years of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, even its largest cities such as New York and Boston were made up mostly of single-family houses and row houses. Individuals and families that either did not want or could not afford such housing usually rented rooms in house. The term "apartment" originally referred to a room in a house set aside for a separate occupant, rather than a coherent suite of rooms physically separated from others separated by vestibules and hallways.

By the mid-19th century, land and building costs were changing the ways people lived. Initially the largest number of early multi-family buildings in industrial cities such as New York and Chicago were tenements housing numerous poor families, many of whom were immigrants. Apartment buildings had become known popularly as "French flats" due to the preponderance of apartment buildings in Paris and were seen as somehow un-American, and not considered suitable housing. Small apartment buildings with relatively spacious apartments began to be built only as middle- and upper-class tastes began to change. As single-family houses on individual lots became prohibitively expensive to all but the wealthy, and even attached row houses began to be beyond the reach of middle-class incomes, apartment buildings became more acceptable. For working- and middle-class families, these buildings offered an alternative to tenement buildings and the overcrowded culture of the slums.

During the latter half of the 19th century, small walk-up apartment buildings of two- to five-stories began to be built in many American cities. Four- and five-story apartment buildings in New York began to rise next to brownstone and brick row houses. In Boston, freestanding wood "triple-deckers," apartment buildings similar to Chicago's three-flat buildings, also became common. Many middle-class Washington D.C. residents dwelled in three-story attached brick buildings known locally as "rowhouse flats."

These small apartment buildings generally had apartments with greater square footage and larger rooms than those in tenement buildings. Ventilation was better, with each room having at least one window, and up-to-date amenities such as steam heat were the rule. These buildings were most often built by commercial builders who soon developed standardized floor plans and apartment features based on local demand. They often were bought by individual owners who occupied one apartment while renting out others. This allowed many middle-class families to become home owners despite rising urban housing costs.

Various configurations of apartment buildings began to be developed in Chicago by builders and developers eager to cater to buyers. In the 1870s and 80s, the most common were small, two- and three-story buildings that were slightly narrower than one standard Chicago lot (approximately 25 feet) in width. Sometimes these buildings, especially those built along streets with streetcar lines, had shops on the first floor, while apartments occupied upper floors. They were most often built of brick, sometimes with stone fronts, although wood remained common in outlying neighborhoods outside the so-called "fire limits" where city building codes mandated



Acceptance of apartment living among Chicagoans was a significant trend in the last quarter of the 19th century. Freestanding single-family residences surrounded by open space, such as the Bellinger Cottage of 1869 (left), were preferred by Chicagoans early in the city's history. Increasing land costs in the 1860s and 1870s, however, soon required more intensive land use in close-in neighborhoods, and rows of townhouses became popular. Early examples include Park Row from the 1860s (middle left, now demolished) and the 10 rowhouses of the Burling Row House Chicago Landmark District, built in 1875 (middle right). The Hotel St. Benedict Flats from 1882 (bottom) is considered one of Chicago's first fashionable apartment buildings. The apartment buildings in theBissell Street District, built a year later, were meant for a more middle-income clientele.

masonry construction after the Fire of 1871. These apartment buildings were usually built in the then-popular Italianate or Queen Anne styles.

The flats on Bissell possess certain basic configurations of form that were typical of this historic housing type. The typical flats from the period had rectangular floor plans with the narrow end facing the street, maximizing valuable street frontage, and were built one apartment per floor atop raised basements. Roofs were flat, and brick, stone, or metal bays often projected towards the street, increasing available light and air for front rooms in the buildings. Wood or stone steps flanked with cast-iron railings typically led to a small front porch. The entrance doors, usually detailed with wood and glass panels, led to a small common vestibule. The first-floor apartment opened directly onto this vestibule, while a staircase (accessed through a separate door) led to the upper-floor apartments. The early flat buildings were detailed in a variety of architectural styles, but most commonly had ornamental treatments that used simplified Italianate, Romanesque or Classical-style details. The inherent visual qualities of building materials, such as rough-cut stone or the reds and browns of the brick colors commonly used for Chicago buildings, were often among the most striking visual qualities of such buildings built with modest budgets.

The Bissell Street District is a significant grouping of buildings that exemplify the rich architecture and high quality craftsmanship that was available to Chicago's working-class and emerging middle-class families around the turn of the 20th century. This ensemble of early Chicago flats conveys a sense of the history of residential real estate development in Lincoln Park in the period.

Criteria for Designation

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sec. 2-120-690), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a final recommendation of landmark designation for a building, structure, or district if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated "criteria for landmark designation," as well as possesses a significant degree of its historic design integrity.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the Bissell Street District be designated as a Chicago Landmark.

Criterion 1: Critical Part of the City's History

Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois or the United States.

- The Bissell Street District constitutes a rare, surviving group of "first-generation" flat buildings in Chicago, built in response to the great population growth and increased land values that occurred in Chicago in the years after the Fire of 1871.

- The Bissell Street District represents a visually unusual, and early surviving example of a Chicago residential development in the city planned, designed, and built as a whole. The use of standardized design types, and the symmetrical arrangement of these types within the block-long District anticipated larger residential developments built in the twentieth century.

Criterion 4: Important Architecture

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.

- The Bissell Street District is a cohesive and remarkable intact group of early flat buildings from the late 19th century.

- The Bissell flats represent a transitional form that stood between the long groups of rowhouses that were common in the1870s and the two- and three-flats that became a staple of Chicago architecture beginning in the 1880s.

- The District is distinctive for the fine detailing and craftsmanship of the buildings' mansard roofs, pressed-metal cornices, limestone trim, window and door openings, and recessed wall areas. These features exemplify the Italianate, Second Empire, and Queen Anne stylistic influences of the period. The high quality materials and craftsmanship used to execute these features further distinguishes the district.

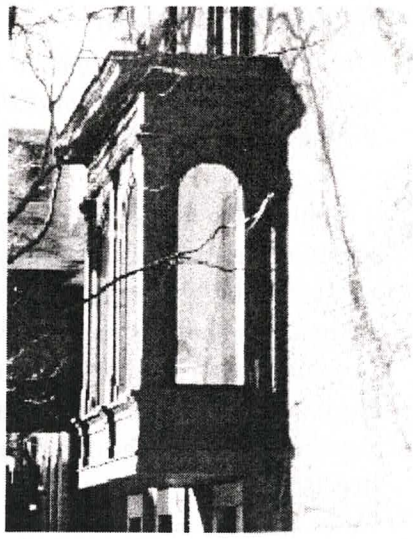
- The Bissell Street District has been widely recognized for its architectural quality. The Chicago Historic Resources Survey rated the buildings in the proposed District as "significant to the community." The buildings also were cited in the *AIA Guide to Chicago* and noted as "structures of special distinction" in the nomination form for the Sheffield Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Criterion 6: Distinctive Theme as a District

Its representation of an architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other theme expressed through distinctive areas, districts, places, buildings, structures, works of art, or other objects that may or may not be contiguous. The Bissell Street District displays a distinct visual unity based on a consistent scale, building setbacks, design, size, use of materials, and overall detailing.

- The District is unique in its use of standard design types which are repeated and symmetrically organized on the block, resulting in a unified but not homogenous visual appearance that is unique among Chicago residential blocks of the period.

- Through the unified use of Italianate and Queen Anne stylistic motifs and architectural details, the Bissell Street District creates a distinctive and recognizable sense of place within the larger Lincoln Park neighborhood.



A selection of details from the Bissell Street District.

Integrity Criterion

The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic community, architectural or aesthetic interest or value.

It is unusual to find a block-long collection of residences from the late-19th century that combine the character and overall integrity in the manner that the Bissell Street District possesses. Unlike other residential blocks in Chicago from the period, the entire district was designed and built as a unified whole, and has sustained no later construction or demolished structures. As a result the physical character of these buildings in terms of scale, setback from the street, entries, fenestration, and detail is consistent, and the individual design types work together to provide the onlooker with a strong sense of the overall character of the historic streetscape.

Virtually all of the buildings retain the majority of the physical characteristic that define their historic significance. These include historic wall materials, including brick and stone, and fine architectural details such as pressed metal cornices and mansard roofs. Additionally, they continue to serve the same function more than a century after their construction with little discernible changes in style. The District does not contain buildings from later periods of development, and no buildings in the original design have been lost.

The Bissell Street District retains its overall physical integrity. Top right: A photograph of the District taken in 1966. Bottom right: A view of the District in 2006.

Aside from the early changes to the rear elevations on the west side of Bissell to accommodate the elevated train right-of-way, the most common exterior changes to the buildings in the District are relatively minor and generally involve the replacement of stoops, doors, and windows. All of the exterior stoops in the district appear to be replacements, though some original metal railings appear to have been retained. These replacement stoops, however, generally reflect historic configurations. One building in the District (2101 N. Bissell) has been more extensively remodeled with changes to the window openings and roofline.

Significant Historical and Architectural Features

Whenever a building is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the "significant historical and architectural features" of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based on its evaluation of the Bissell Street District, the Commission recommends that the significant features be identified as:

- all exterior building elevations, including rooflines, visible from public rights-of-way.

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Illustrations
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